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*Mr. Gladstone
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AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

SATURDAY EVENING ASSEMBLY

OF THE

Working Men of Chester,

DECEMBER 27, 1862,

BY THE

RT. HON. W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P.

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER.

C H E S T E R :

HUGH ROBERTS, EASTGATE ROW.

1863.

Price Twopence.

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THE HISTORY OF

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AND

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FROM THE

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A D D R E S S .

MY FRIENDS,

Understanding that it is usual for those who preside at your meetings on Saturday evenings to address to you some remarks, I have thought I could not choose a more fit subject than that, which is at present perhaps more than any other upon the minds of Englishmen, I mean the distress of our fellow-countrymen in the cotton districts, together with the topics which it naturally suggests to the mind.

And first I shall present to you a rude, but I hope a tolerably accurate, outline of the facts.

The bulks of the cotton manufacture of this country is carried on in a region comprised within twenty-seven of those Poor Law Districts, which we term Unions. Their population is somewhat beyond two millions : and the rated value of that portion of their property which is subject to rates, is above five millions and a half.

Certain portions of the cotton manufacture are, however, carried on beyond the limits of this area : the most considerable of those outlying portions probably is in Glasgow ; and others vary in amount down to the scattered factories such as that at Mold in our neighbourhood. The diminution of trade in these secondary districts, and the loss of weekly wages, must have been quite as great as in the main region, in proportion to the numbers usually employed. The distress would however generally be less severe in proportion, as the district may be less exclusively dependent on the cotton industry. Yet even in these places much has been suffered, and much has been done : at Mold, for example, where the owners of the mill now closed have, I believe, been most liberal in

equal to the work of regularly supplying the sudden demand of thousands and tens of thousands, without, at the same time incurring enormous waste, and giving direct encouragement to fraud.

The second was the noble independence of the people themselves, who were unwilling either to cast themselves upon charity, or to exercise that right of resort to the Poor Law which, although it is a right, is nevertheless, for the able-bodied man, an extreme one, and one never to be exercised without pain to a manly and well-constituted mind.

The third was an excusable timidity, which seems here and there to have affected the administrators of relief: Boards of Guardians not always learning in a moment that an extraordinary calamity required an unusual freedom in the measures for meeting it; and some managers of charitable funds, alarmed at comparing the amount of voluntary subscriptions, as it then stood, with the demands of the coming winter, and not yet having faith enough in the ability and will of the nation to administer by spontaneous bounty to this great distress.

All this was to be expected, and cannot be blamed. But from such causes, the pressure of suffering was, it may be feared, in some places sharpened for a time: and a lady, blessed with large means, and more richly blessed in a disposition to use them largely, I mean Miss Burdett Coutts, having forwarded a munificent contribution, wisely expressed her wish, that the whole of it might be laid out at once. We must all, at all times, meet the real and essential wants of the present, before reserving anything for the future. At that time, of which I now speak, in one most distressed Union, the rate of weekly relief was not in all, I believe, more than about thirteen pence a-head, per man, woman, and child taken together. All this has steadily improved. Intelligent benevolence, most of all in the district itself, has supplied both the machinery and the means. The average rate of out-door Poor Law Relief, which was before the distress 1s. 2½d. per head, per week, is now nearly 1s. 6d. The funds of the Poor Law are expended, in the Lancashire and Cheshire district, at a weekly rate equal to more than a million per annum; or about five shillings in the pound on the rateable property, after deducting that portion of it, from which, in the present circumstances, rates cannot be collected. "The total weekly expenditure by Guardians

and by Committees of Charity in the twenty-seven Unions is £43,547,* and this sum yields to each receiver of relief, on an average, within a fraction of two shillings per head. In addition to this, the Executive Committee has distributed 4,734 Bales of clothing, each bale on an average equal to one cubic yard: nor are we to forget that besides this great river of bounty, many little streams are also flowing through private channels, and each and all of them bearing consolation with them as they flow. Now, looking to this amount of two shillings a-head, aided a little in many cases with supplies in kind, I, for one, think as follows. Though, for the sake of our noble-minded fellow-countrymen, we might all wish it were much more, yet looking to the nature of the case, and to the absolute necessity, for the permanent welfare of the whole community, of preserving something of a due relation between the state of the independent labourer and that of the receiver of relief, the present rate ought to be regarded as sufficient and satisfactory. And we have the pleasure of hearing, from the report of Mr. Farnall, a most able gentleman, appointed by Mr. Villiers to act in the district on behalf of the Poor Law Board, that “neither he himself, nor the Executive Committee, have received any complaints from the poor of insufficiency of relief or charitable aid.”

So much for the amount of the relief: the prospect is certainly no worse as to its duration. In the first place there is some small reason to hope, that the high-water mark, so to call it, of the distress may have been reached. At any rate, so far as the receivers of aid from the Poor Law are concerned, there was in the week ending December 6th, a diminution in their numbers of more than two thousand; and this was followed, in the week ending December 13th, the latest period up to which I have obtained accounts, by a further diminution, amounting to 3,443.

As respects the Poor Law, Parliament has wisely given to the distressed Parishes and Unions three auxiliary powers, which come successively into action as the burden of the rates may increase; 1—the power to the Parish, when its rates reach a certain point, of obtaining aid from the Union: 2—the power to the Union of borrowing money to a limited extent on the security of future rates: 3—the power of calling in aid the whole rateable property of the county.

* From information supplied by Mr. Farnall:

On the other hand, as regards the Charitable Funds, nothing but a little time, and the admirable means of publicity supplied by the newspaper press, have been required. The Charitable Committees in the different neighbourhoods are spending £25,000 per week ; but the Executive Committee at the centre was receiving, from the 6th to the 20th of this month, which is the latest information I have been able to obtain, above £7,000 a day. Speaking of public and general subscriptions, and of the district of the twenty-seven Unions, it would appear that they amount at this time to more than £1,200,000 ; we may safely assume (but this is a mere opinion) that the machinery now in operation will raise this sum to £1,500,000 ; whereas the sum hitherto expended must fall short of one-half the amount actually raised, so that we may look forward with cheerfulness, in the absence of any new and great calamity, to the remainder of the winter. It seems to be the opinion of the best informed, that, under the operation of the Providential laws, which regulate supply and demand both for materials and for manufactures, there will probably exist in the month of March a state of things which will bring about a small but stable revival of trade and employment. Should the dreadful and sanguinary war, which desolates America, and throws the surplus of its curses upon Europe, be brought to a close, a further great and early relief might be expected ; but in any case the benevolent administrators of the public bounty will, it may be trusted, meet the Spring with some considerable remainder of funds in their hands. A remainder, however, which may be less, and under no circumstances is likely to be more, than must be required in order partially to repair the consequences of this wide-spread and long continued desolation.

And now, my friends, I have done with figures. Let us think a little of the meaning, of which in this case figures are so full.

The first thoughts, which they carry to the mind, are sad and painful enough. We see the silent inroads of sorrow into many a happy home ; care gathering on the brow ; the sickness of hope deferred ; the gradual exhaustion of the store laid up by the double-action of honest toil and intelligent forethought ; the disappearance, one by one, of the comforts that make home seem like home ; the withholding of what is needful, first from the strong, and afterwards from the weakly and the sick ; the mother nursing her baby at

her breast while hunger is impoverishing her own blood : all the painful stages of that crushing process, which carries a population, step by step, from abundance into want.

But there is a brighter side to the picture. Nothing is more ennobling to man, in whatever rank, than sorrow nobly borne. And if ever there was a sorrow nobly borne, surely this is one. Aye more ; for in general we think it much to see one here and there, one out of several, bear his afflictions well, but here is affliction well and manfully endured by thousands, by masses of men, of men and women, of young and old. No murmuring against the dispensations of God ; no complaining against men ; no envious comparison of their case with the case of their employers ; no discontent with the Government or with the Laws ; an universal and unbroken reverence for public order ; under a homely or even a rough exterior, a true delicacy, a true loftiness of sentiment ; an unwillingness to be burdensome, a willingness to suffer patiently, a willingness to turn suffering to account in more frequent and more crowded resort to divine worship, and to make an enforced leisure profitable, by going back to the discipline of boyhood, and gaining once more the first elements of forgotten knowledge : all these things present a noble picture, instructive to us all. A picture which may leave us better, if we lay to heart its lessons, or may leave us worse if, with the eye of indifference, we turn away from them ; but which can hardly, after we have seen it, leave us as we were. A picture intended for us all to look upon, and all to learn from ; for if cotton has done this for the men of Lancashire, cotton is but the instrument in the hand of God, and He can find some other instrument with which to do it for us, when He sees that we need the lesson and can profit by it. A picture, let me add, such as I know not what country or what class has presented or would present, except this class in this country of ours, were the like weight and sweep of calamity to descend upon it.

One thing we have, however, especially to wish for our suffering fellow-countrymen : it is that as they have thus bravely begun and continued, so they may persevere unto the end. They may have new forms of trial before them, one in particular. They have passed from the condition of high paid labourers, to that of receivers of relief ; and this they have done with no diminution, but with an increase of

respect and honour. They will, we hope, pass back again, and may it be soon, from the condition of receivers of relief to that of high paid labourers. But this they cannot do at once. A state of things is pretty certain to arrive, in which the range of prices, on which wages must depend, will be such as to enable their employers, or such of their employers as only bend and do not break beneath the storm, to offer low wages ; but not such as to enable them to offer high ones.

“ Now when that period arrives, the employers will, on their side, have every motive to resume work as soon as possible. The markets for goods will have been effectually relieved, if not swept clean, by the long suspension ; there will be the desire to obtain some profit, however small, upon fixed capital lying dead ; there will also be the desire (I speak now of economical considerations only,) to lighten the pressure of poor’s rates, and to obtain rents for cottages. At the first moment then, when they can, we may reckon that very many employers will be anxious to get to work with the prospect of very reduced profits : but reduction of profits will not enable them to attempt it, unless, for the time, wages be reduced also.”*

To accept these low wages, to commence again the workman’s career on a reduced and contracted footing, will be a new form of trial, and of sharp trial to the population at present unemployed : may they meet it as duty and not as pride would prompt them, and may it be their last.

Now let us look away from the actual sufferers themselves, to the immense amount of Christian charity, of true brotherly love, that this visitation has been the means of creating and calling into action.

In the mere amount of the private subscriptions, I do not know that there is much to boast of. A country with an aggregate income, in the three kingdoms, of between five and six hundred millions a year, with an income subject to income tax, and thus representing in the main the upper and middle class, of between two and three hundred millions a year, ought not to think much of raising a million or two by subscription, of course I mean without starving the other and ordinary calls of benevolence, to meet a great and an extraordinary distress. But, were we able to examine what I may call the anatomy of this subscription, we should find that

* The passage within inverted commas has been added since the delivery of the address.

it is composed of various elements, that in its great sum total is contained many a widow's mite, many a noble offering, for which only strict self-denial could have supplied the means, which has proceeded from a large heart, and which has made that heart, in and by the act of sacrifice, larger still. And again, in all true giving, there is something better than the gift. How many a conscience may this calamity have awakened to see the duty and the privilege of ministering to the wants of others ! How many an ice-bound spirit may, for the first time, have begun to melt in this great furnace of affliction ! Think above all of those who have been called upon to give, not their money only, nor their prayers only, but their personal service, their toil by day, their thoughts by night upon a wakeful pillow, studying how to encounter the sorrow and the suffering which they have seen rising like a deluge everywhere around them, and threatening to overwhelm them : such there are, and they may be counted by the hundred or the thousand ; they will earn, perhaps, neither gold nor praise, but greater than these is their reward.

There are, however, some parts of this subscription, that require a word of notice. Lancashire and Cheshire, besides bearing the legal burden upon rateable property, will be found, I apprehend, to have contributed, in various forms, considerably over half-a-million. It is yet more gratifying to see how our fellow-subjects, in the remote dominions of the Crown, especially, I think, from some of the Australian Colonies, have sent munificent gifts to our labourers in their want. They have shown that the spaces which separate us, however widely, on the surface of the earth, cannot effectually divide hearts that are knit together. There are many gifts that would well deserve notice, if time permitted. Two I cannot pass over. It is most of all to be remembered by us with gratitude, that France, herself suffering under a similar, though less widely extended visitation, and America, in this her agony of mortal conflict, have generously aided the funds for the relief of Lancashire distress. Surely, my friends, when we see these things, we may presume to hope that there is not quite so much of wrath, malice, and hatred, between nation and nation, as we are sometimes tempted to suppose.

Within the last fifteen years, three great calamities of an extraordinary description have befallen the British Empire :

the first was the Irish Famine ; the second was the Indian Mutiny ; the third is the Lancashire Distress. The first of these has led to an immense improvement in the state of Ireland, especially in the condition of the mass of the people. The second, by the changes of which it has been the occasion, has left British India with brighter prospects than it had ever before enjoyed. May we not hope that the third also will come to be remembered in future times, not for its inflictions only during its passage, but for the good it will have left behind it ; for both the good it will have revealed, and the good it will have done ? This question opens a wide field. I will not speculate on the subject of our future supply of cotton, which is to me at present an obscure one. But I will say a few words upon matters connected with our internal economy as a people.

First and foremost, I think there is no doubt that this vast calamity will tend to unite together in closer harmony, union, and affection. all classes of the nation. Our laws and established order, which have stood such a strain, and stood it so well, will be more than ever valued. Persons of rank and wealth, devoting their time and care to this work of relief, are by all such acts binding together effectually the hearts of men. The zeal and devotion of the clergy have, I believe, been beyond all praise ; and the support and consolation they have administered, beyond all price. I speak of what I happen to know best ; but I do not doubt that like testimony can be rendered by others to the labours of other ministers of religion. The admirable conduct of the suffering workpeople cannot be sufficiently acknowledged by any passing tribute of mere words : it must surely tend to increase the confidence reposed in them by other classes of society ; nor can I refrain from repeating here, what I have said elsewhere, and expressing my hope that, whenever again the time arrives for considering the question of the franchise, that conduct will be favourably and liberally remembered. But they, like all of us, have lessons to learn. One lesson, which I hope they will learn and learn largely, is the duty and value of forethought, and the necessity of laying by, when they can, out of their resources, for the evil day. I do not think that the better paid portion of the labouring class of this country have as yet sufficiently perceived how much a wise forethought, exhibited in savings, contributes not only to their comfort, but to their influence and to their independ-

ence. Lancashire has been in this respect a-head of some parts of the country; but I hope I do not presume too much in giving an opinion that even Lancashire was not where she ought to be. For those who prefer to choose an independent investment of their money, this country offers a greater freedom and choice of such investments than any other in the world. For those who act chiefly under the advice of friends, employers, and superiors, the old Savings' Banks have long afforded a well-known and most extensively useful depository, to receive what they can spare. For those who desire to have the most direct assurance that the State can give them of the absolute safety of their earnings, and who also wish, as many Englishmen in all classes do wish, to keep the knowledge of their affairs as much as possible to themselves, the Legislature has provided the Post-office Savings' Banks; and the public has already shown that it attaches a great value to these recent institutions. It is true that the local Postmaster, himself bound to secrecy, knows the deposits he receives: but so does the rich man's Banker, and the Postmaster so far acts as Banker for the classes on whose behalf these Banks have been established. I feel the more anxious to recommend earnestly the habit of forethought, because it appears to me, so far as I can learn, that the savings of the labouring class of the community, during the last twenty years, have scarcely, or up to a very recent time had scarcely, increased in proportion to the increased means of saving afforded them by their improved wages.

Again, I believe, that all those who pass together as companions through this period of suffering, will, among other advantages learn from it an increased respect for one another. The growth of this sentiment has been happily observable, as far as I can learn, in late years. It is the right of the labouring man to get the best price he can for his labour. The State has long ago ceased to impose any restrictions on the exercise of that right. Each man is entitled to judge for himself, at what price he will sell his labour. Any number of persons, being independent, may, if they please, combine together to withhold their labour from the market at any price less than that they choose to set upon it. But they can have no right to deny to others what they claim for themselves: they who think fit to sell labour dearer, can have no right to interfere with others that are disposed to sell it cheaper, any more than a butcher who sells meat in

his shop at eight-pence, has a right to interfere with another who intends to sell at seven-pence half-penny. The free acknowledgement in every form, by each man, of the rights of every other man, lies at the very heart and root of what we term civilisation.

Now let us consider, my friends, for a while, before we close, what civilisation is, of which we hear so much.

When we speak of civilisation, we do not mean the command of man over matter, or his achievements in the world of speculation. We do not mean railways, or telegraphs, or machinery in any of its wonderful developments, or cheap postage, or a cheap and free press, or traversing the ocean with voyages so quick, safe, and punctual, that they seem to serve the purpose of a bridge, or that marvellous art which enables us to purchase lively portraits of our family and friends for a few shillings or even a few pence. We do not mean ingenuity and beauty in design, cheapness and convenience and durability in production. We do not mean splendid edifices, noble statuary or paintings, or success in embodying what is beautiful, that great ornament and delight of life, in all or any of the branches of fine art. We do not in a word mean industrial, commercial, or material progress, even if of the very best kind, and if carried to the very highest degree that it has been or shall be given to man to reach. All these, in their several degrees, are among the tokens of some stage of civilisation already reached; they are the fruit which as a good healthy tree it bears; they are helps, also, towards its further advancement. But they are not civilisation itself. Civilisation resides in man himself, and nowhere else. It lies in the strengthening of his faculties, it lies yet more in clearing and raising his convictions, it lies in the refinement of his tastes, it lies most of all in the improvement of the practical habits of his life. If you show me two mechanics: if one of them is gifted with abilities in his trade which make him, during one part of the week, the envy of his fellow-workmen and the wonder of his employer, but is also cursed with a vice which, for the rest of the week, yields up his body and soul to the brutal influence of drink, and makes his home the scene not of comfort but of desolation: the other is a fair average workman, capable of no high excellence with his hands, earning daily perhaps but half the wages of his abler comrade, but yet constantly set upon turning to the best account the moderate or slender gifts with which alone the Almighty has

endowed him, keeping his heart humble and his body temperate, ever studying to be more and more truthful towards his God, more and more helpful towards his family, ever anxious to make them also, by precept if he can, and at any rate by the safe authority of his example, orderly, diligent, modest, and affectionate, with a good conscience before God and man: which I ask of these two is the man really civilised? The first, with his great powers, is like a slave chained to the wheel of civilisation, compelled to help it forward with his hands, but forbidden, by his own obstinate and ruinous infirmity, to partake of its refreshing influences: he serves at a banquet of which he cannot partake: he is like a torch of flaming pine, which is a light to others, but devours itself. But in the humble home of his, perhaps despised, companion, cleanliness and order reign; husband and wife, parents and children, grow in mutual love from day to day; every good disposition of each member of the family finds a stay and bulwark, and every besetting weakness a rebuke, in the right conduct and discipline of the rest: all of them learn, by respecting others, to respect also the handiwork of God in themselves: good times are not dishonoured by excess, and bad times are cheered partly by the produce of forethought in the good, partly also, and always effectually, by the knowledge that we are not chastened without a purpose, and that chastening is but the quickening of the fire for better tempering the metal of the man. Leisure, such as he may have beyond necessary rest, is applied by such a man to purify the soul, and to elevate the mind; with the outward freedom secured to him by the laws, corresponds a yet nobler inward freedom from degrading tendencies. In the house of that man, though it be floored with clay and roofed with straw, the work of civilisation is advancing; and he and his family are entitled to their place among both its promoters and its products.

If then, my friends, you ask me where civilisation resides, I reply it is in man, and in man only; but in all ranks of men, and sometimes more truly in the lowliest cottage than in the mansions of wealthier persons. If you ask me in what it consists, I reply that, apart from religion, its constituent parts are many, are more than could easily be reckoned; yet some of them may be named, and such are these: the love of order in things mental and bodily, personal and domestic; the love of cleanliness; the love of the works of Nature; the love of things beautiful produced by

the art of man ; the love of courtesy and kindly manners ; the love of knowledge, and the sense that it guides us upwards ; the love of our neighbours of every class ; a respect for these rights as fully equal to our own, and a respect, not for their rights only, but for their feelings, showing itself in small things fully as much as in great ; the love of law, love of freedom, love of country, love of the throne and of Her who sits upon it, and who is happily to us both the highest image of every social and civil blessing, and the first among all human agents in procuring and assuring them.

Now, my friends, civilisation thus regarded, means a great blessing, or rather it means an aggregate or collection of great blessings. But they are not blessings for which we are to wait with folded arms : they are not blessings like the heat and the rain from heaven, or like those minerals beneath the surface of the earth, which have contributed so largely towards making our country rich and strong : they are gifts of Providence indeed, but they belong to that class of the gifts of Providence, which are given to us through our own exertions, which it is in our power to attain, and which it is our own fault if we fail to possess.

And again, not only are they blessings dependent on the agency of man to gain, or on his neglect to lose, but likewise they are blessings, and the work of civilisation is a work, in the promotion of which we all, of all classes, have our share. No station, however high, releases from the obligation ; no station, however humble, excludes from the pleasure and the privilege. Those who travel from land to land will know that nothing is more readily observable than the difference between the masses of the people in one country and another, as to the degree of civilisation which the individuals composing them have personally attained. Just as the national wealth is the sum total of the fruits of all the labour, skill, and intellect applied to production, and as the hodman at two shillings or half-a-crown a day contributes to it no less really than the man of property who founds an ironwork, or the engineer who projects and executes a railway, or the capitalist who regulates the exchanges of the world, so, as respects this higher treasure, it is a treasure made up of the joint efforts of the whole community, and every one of us is responsible for promoting in his measure and degree the work of civilisation.

Moreover we live in times when the distribution of the shares of this work is gradually and sensibly altering. A thousand years ago, in the days of our English Alfred, or of the yet greater and more famous Charlemagne, the will of one man went far towards guiding the conduct and determining the destiny of all. Sometimes it would even happen that nations or tribes were brought to baptism in masses, and placed, by baptism, within all the civilising and reforming influences of the Christian Faith and Church. A great French writer, Montesquieu, observes that, in the infancy of political society, the prominent men make and mould the nation, but in the maturity of it, the nation makes and moulds the prominent men. If this was true in his day, it is more largely true in ours; for more has been done within the last two or three generations towards establishing popular rights on a secure basis, towards providing for their progressive extension, and towards allotting a real share in the management of public affairs, to the different members of the community at large, than had been done for many centuries before. In concurrence with this natural and beneficial change, it is highly needful that the members of classes formerly excluded from social power, but now coming to a share in its possession, should recollect that society has much higher and more extended claims upon them, than it had before. Where, unhappily, slavery prevails, it comes to be thought of little consequence, so as the labourer performs a certain amount of work, whether in other respects he lives the life of a man, or of a beast. But in proportion, as we get farther and farther from slavery, as the personal rights of each individual are more and more jealously guarded by the laws, and as he himself is, by liberal institutions, provided with an influence in the making of those laws by which he is to be governed, society is more and more entitled to expect from him, along with such mental cultivation as he may be able to attain, an enlightened conscience, a cheerful and steady deference to lawful authority, an honourable sense of independence, an unwillingness to become a burden upon others, a clearer view and a fuller performance of his duties as a husband, a father, a neighbour, a parishioner, a juryman, a voter at elections, or whatever else he may be.

And all this is no light matter. Human life, rationally viewed, is a serious and earnest thing. When the image of

our duty is placed before us, we are sometimes afraid of it, and are tempted to run away from it. It is not to any one class of society, believe me, that the feeling is confined which makes us think the day no more than sufficient for the burdens laid upon it. That which is felt variously among other classes in other forms, is felt, and very naturally felt, by the labouring classes in its simplest form. When they rise in the morning, labour faces them; and when the day closes in, weariness following upon toil, has exhausted and depressed them. Yet your presence here, my friends, to night, shews that this, though it may be true, is not the whole truth. When there is a brave and gallant spirit in a man, it commonly, and in the absence of extraordinary trials, manages to save something of time, of thought, of energy, from the urgent demands of his outer life and his bodily wants. There is the blessed rest of Sunday, a standing and a speaking witness to the everlasting truth that man shall not live by bread alone; and, on every day, the careful gathering of even small fragments of time, some of which well-nigh every man, woman, and child, has it in his power to gather, will, so it be but steadily and constantly attended to, and made part of the constant habit of our lives, produce in the end not only considerable but even surprising results.

Yet, after all, it must not for a moment be forgotten that the one central and effectual element, and the only guarantee, of our civilisation, present and future, is to be found in Christianity. Individual men, living in a Christian land, perhaps not having been roused to a lively interest in Christianity themselves, and seeing no direct connection between the gospel and many useful discoveries and prosperous industries, may think they can fashion a civilisation for themselves out of the materials which earth affords, and without the trouble of taking into view our relations to the world unseen, and to Him who rules in it. Far be it from me to bring a railing accusation against them: but I think they are mistaken: this world is God's world by right, and ours only by gift and sufferance, and it cannot go well, if we try to shut Him out of it.

But in truth, what we have most to fear is not the prevalence of error of this kind, taking the form of philosophy and of system; it is our own faithlessness, our own selfishness, our own worldliness, ever drawing us downward in

despite of convictions, which grow weaker and weaker by neglect, and which are at length wholly stifled by the thorns and briars of evil habit, growing up into a tangled thicket around and over them. It is not erroneous belief that is the cause of wide spread ruin, it is the fear of discipline, it is the pressure of cares, desires, and appetites, which shut out from the mind of the creature the thought of the Creator. Many of us have heard read at this solemn season in the services of the Church the account of the birth of our Lord at Bethlehem. In that account we are told by the Evangelist these simple words; "and there was no room for them in the inn." What thoughts do these words awaken in the mind? Perhaps the first thought may be this: no wonder that, in so great a concourse of people of all ranks coming up to be registered for taxing, there should be no room in an inn, for the poor and unpretending Mother of the Saviour to be delivered of her first-born Child. But the second thought may be, that the world is like that inn: that amidst its pomp and magnificence, amidst the whirl and hurry of its business, amidst the ever multiplying devices of its ingenuity and triumphs of its enterprise, amidst the crowd and pressure of even its neediest inhabitants, there is no room for the Saviour of mankind. But upon this thought yet another thought may follow: the thought that if that inn, in respect of its bustle and its turmoil, is like the world at large, it is yet more like something else: it is a yet truer image of the heart and mind of the individual man, when, giving himself over without reserve, whether to his vicious indulgences, or to his selfish enjoyments, or to his schemes of advancement in the world, or to his ordinary business, or even to his most pressing necessities, he fills himself so full with all or any of these, that there is no room in him for the thought that his food and raiment, his gifts and faculties, his hopes and prospects, all he is and all he can ever be, come down to him from the Most High, and are to be rendered up again to Him from whom they came, in thanks and praise, and in dutiful obedience.

And now, my friends, having detained you thus long, I release you from your kind attention, to enjoy, as I hope, the entertainments of the evening.









